

A NATIONAL PARK COMES TO NEW BEDFORD

What It Means to Be a National Park

“...to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

National Park Service Organic Act, 1916

National parks, by any measure, are extraordinary places. Singularly American, the national park idea issued 130 years ago from a wellspring of uncommon vision, opportunity, national pride, and a democratic spirit. Indeed, the park concept embraces the noblest aspirations and virtues of America's democratic principles.

Beginning with its first manifestation in Yellowstone in 1872, the United States' national park model, melding resource protection and public use, has flourished and been adopted by more than 100 other countries.

Experiences in national parks refresh our minds and recharge our spirits. Some areas conferred with national park designation showcase noteworthy natural systems and scenic splendor. Cultural sites represent people or events that helped shape this country's history and character. All parks offer superb recreational outlets, some specifically for that purpose.

Each park's intrinsic values are preserved for public enjoyment and inspiration both now and in

the future. Individually, the parks' myriad stories spark our imaginations, touch our emotions, and open the doors to personal discovery. Collectively, national parks embody the story of America and its contributions to world history and culture. They substantially define us as caretakers of our heritage and celebrate who we are as a people.

The National Park Service manages 380 units of the National Park System. Each has its own particular niche among places of national significance in the park system. The legislation that created New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park in 1996 acknowledged that “...*the National Park System presently contains no sites commemorating whaling and its contribution to American history.*” Further, it recognized “...*the city of New Bedford was the 19th century capital of the world's whaling industry and retains significant architectural features, archival materials, and museum collections illustrative of this period;...*” Finally, the law affirmed that “...*New Bedford's historic resources provide unique opportunities for illustrating and interpreting the whaling industry's contribution to the economic, social, and environmental history of the United States and provide opportunities for public use and enjoyment;...*”

The purposes of the park, in the words of the act, are “...*to help preserve, protect, and interpret the resources within the areas described...;*” “...*to collaborate with the city of New Bedford and with associated...organizations to further the purposes of the park...;*” and “...*to provide opportunities for the inspirational benefit and education of the American people.*”

The National Park Service is charged with carrying out this mission at New Bedford in league with

the city and community partners. Working together, we can realize the vision for this special place in American and world history.

“The national park idea, the best idea we ever had.... Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best...”

Wallace Stegner, 1983